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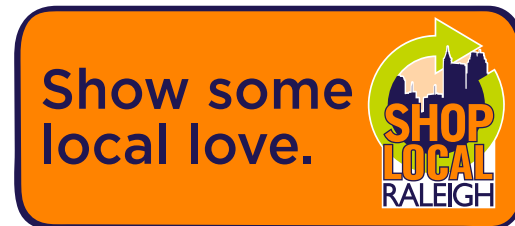
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Chef Corbett Monica in front of his famous Italian eatery, Bella Monica

Bella Monica

Cucina



Vino

Part 1 – Takeout

BY CHRISTY GRIFFITH • PHOTOS BY CRASH S. GREGG

Editor's Note: This is a two-part restaurant profile on longtime Raleigh favorite, Bella Monica. One of our food journalists, Christy Griffith, wrote the first article during the takeout-only duration of North Carolina's Phase 1 during the coronavirus shutdown. Since then, restaurants have re-opened, with many still offering curbside takeout. All the dishes we tried in this article are still available for dine-in and take-out. The restaurant profile following this one – by our Food Editor Brian Adornetto – took place before Phase 1, when we were able to sit down for a full profile with Chef Monica at his restaurant. We hope you enjoy reading both the takeout and dine-in articles as much as we enjoyed writing them (and eating the food!).



To say the current dining scene has changed would be an understatement the size of COVID-19's reach. Restaurants have run the gamut in ways they are adapting to the pandemic, whether it be closing doors completely and waiting it out, changing concepts from fine dining to catered family-style options, or working with a skeleton staff to offer their menus to-go. Whichever restaurant you've supported, you've surely done so from the comfort of your own dining table, perhaps not even decanting the food from the takeout packaging to a plate.

Bella Monica has always had a fair amount of to-go business before restaurants were forced to close their dining rooms, so the transition hasn't been as hard on them as it has for many other eateries. Opened by Corbett and Julie Monica in 2000, this Italian-American institution has consistently wowed patrons with their renditions of old school favorites incorporating many of Corbett's grandmother's recipes. All the eats are good eats here, but

if you see something with the word "Nana's" attached, don't hesitate to order it.

We visited Bella Monica at the Old Raleigh Village shopping center off of Edwards Mill Road to see how



The Roasted Mushrooms are meaty and toothsome in a garlic-herb butter, with ped peppers, a drizzle of savory tomato oil, and a perfectly fried egg on top that provides an extra unctuous sauce.

their take-out compared to the dine-in version. If you are looking for the CliffsNotes, they are as follows: you will not be disappointed. Their website is updated with the current menus available to-go, and you'll even find dedicated gluten-free and vegan menus for those who follow alternative diets; there is truly something for everyone. Bella Monica's dreamy housemade focaccia bathing in the most fragrant of olive oils comes with all orders, and there is even a gluten-free version as well! Full disclosure: we did not order a salad. Salads are delicious, but when I'm stress-eating during a global pandemic, I'm on the high-carb, full-fat spectrum.

The Roasted Mushrooms (\$12), meaty and toothsome in a garlic-herb butter, are an excellent way to start a meal. Red peppers and a drizzle of savory tomato oil are excellent co-conspirators, and the perfectly fried egg on top provides an extra unctuous sauce – nothing could be more satisfying than poking a runny yolk and watching it >>>

The oven-roasted Mussels come swimming in an extraordinary mushroom-leek cream sauce, will leave you wishing you had asked for a straw to finish it off.



Bella Monica's Baked Ziti made me remember that baked ziti can actually be spectacular.

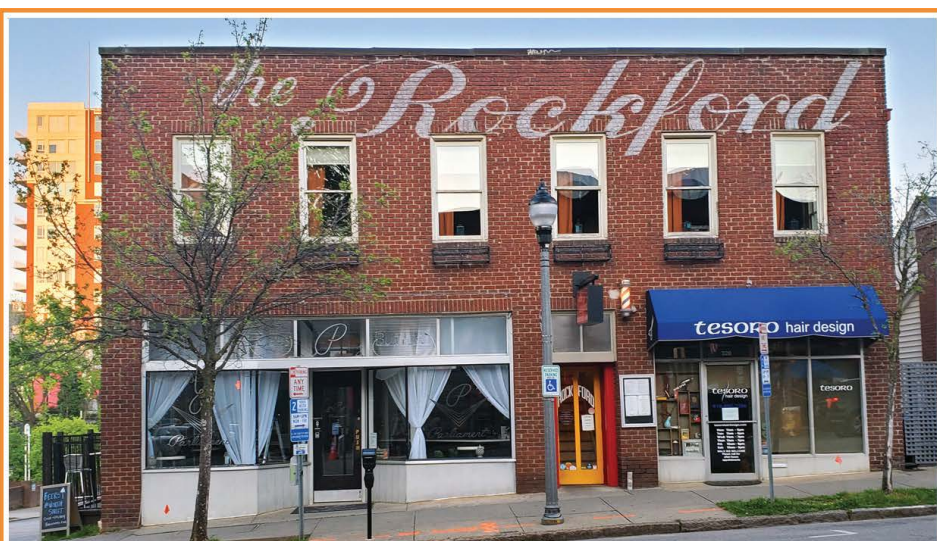
pool between all those vegetal nooks and crannies. A light shower of sharp pecorino romano is the bow on top of an effortlessly sophisticated present to the mushroom lovers in your life. This dish would make a lovely meal rounded out with a salad, but please refer to paragraph 3. (I rounded this out with baked pasta, instead.)

If the mood strikes for something briny, the Mussels (\$15) will surely hit the spot. These oven-roasted bivalves come swimming in an extraordinary mushroom-leek cream sauce that will leave you wishing you asked for a straw to finish it off. (Not my finest moment, but if we're being honest, you picturing me drinking cream sauce from a

straw when I've already admitted that I'm using coronavirus as an excuse to skip eating fresh vegetables is also not my worst moment. Last night, I served mozzarella sticks and strawberry milkshakes for dinner and convinced everyone it technically had all the food groups in it.) But enough about the direction my life is going right now, back to these mussels and this sauce. Did I mention the crisp slices of ciabatta that come alongside so you can mop up the marriage between the salty juices of the mussels and the cream sauce like a normal person? Because sometimes you forget to request a straw.

Mom's Old School Meatballs (\$12) are pretty much destined for sharing, because how can you keep other forks

from going in unless you're going to do the thing where you fake-cough over everything you want to claim? That strategy is, of course in especially poor taste right now. These are the red sauce-bathed meatballs that you think of when you romanticize them in your mind: not fussy, not trying to be a fusion of six different cuisines, not trying to do anything but give you a well-deserved hug from the inside of your stomach. On top comes a hefty dollop of ricotta sourced from someplace that I can only imagine is staffed by little Italian grandmas, and it is the best ricotta I've ever had from a restaurant. You cannot sip it through a straw, though. You'll have to just eat it on top of your



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meatballs like a normal person, no matter how abnormal these times may be. Which can be hard because these feelings ain't gonna eat themselves.

But if the only thing that is going to drown the despair and misery brought on by the lack of meaningful human interaction is ricotta, then order up the Baked Ziti (\$15). It tastes just as great at home in your sweatpants (bravo for even wearing pants!) with your box wine as it did when you were dining in the restaurant with your expertly paired, imported Italian red while wearing pants that don't have the stains of last night's microwaved Chef Boyardee explosion. If the meatballs are a hug from the inside, the ziti is bear-hugging you until you forget why you were crying into your pasta in the first place. It's enrobed in not only ricotta but Nana's gravy and is covered with a thick layer of stretchy mozzarella, kissed with those beautiful brown broiled bits that everyone knows is the best part of the cheese. You want to know how good this ziti is? My youngest had cancer in 2009 and generous people brought us food almost every day while she was going through treatment. Apparently, the following things are true: 1. people show you they love you through baked ziti, 2. you cannot make a small batch of baked ziti, 3. you can only make baked ziti to serve approximately 25 very large and hungry teenage athletes



The Chicken Balsamico was served with roasted tomatoes, sautéed spinach, and a honey balsamic sauce. The sweet and vinegary combination was a big hit at our table.

at one time. We got fourteen baked zitis in the first four weeks of treatment. FOURTEEN BAKED ZITIS. I could not stomach, smell, or think of baked ziti for over ten years. Bella Monica's baked ziti made me remember that baked ziti can actually be spectacular, and the timing couldn't be better; if there is anything on this menu that screams, "I AM THE COMFORT FOOD YOU ARE SEEKING, EAT ME NOW," this is it.

Will their famous flatbread pizzas pass the *will it to-go well* test? Oh, yes. I had the Corbetto Flatbread (\$14/small, \$17/medium, \$22/large), a red sauced, mozzarella dish that comes topped with a delectable combination of roasted red pepper, mushrooms, and kalamata olives. I can attest that this is good hot on the drive home from curbside pick-up, but it also passes the very important *will it be delicious cold from the fridge for breakfast?* test. I may have almost preferred it cold from the fridge because it was absolutely the best breakfast I've had since I stopped wearing pants around the house.

Sometimes the weather is really nice, and the pollen is not trying to make people play the "Is it seasonal allergies or coronavirus?" game. If you're lucky enough to have somewhere to eat outside, the Chicken Balsamico (\$18) tastes like sunshine cuisine. Sautéed spinach, roasted tomatoes, and chicken breast dressed in a honey-balsamic reduction is a simple but delicious combination that can make you forget about the lack of hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and N95 masks for at least as long as it takes you to eat it. So, for your own sake, eat it s-l-o-w.

My favorite dish of all was the Shrimp & Calamari (\$22). A rich and briny squid ink linguine – jet-black and by far the most impressive-looking pasta I've ever enjoyed from a take-out container – comes dressed in the most exquisite sauce of all: Bella Monica's red pepper crema. I joked about drinking sauce through a straw, but seriously, I would drink this sauce through a straw. It's bright orange and tangy from the roasted red peppers, but the added cream just makes you want to absolutely drink! it! from! a! straw! (Please consider adding velvety shots of this sauce to your take-out menu, Bella Monica?) Then you add the bouncy, succulent shrimp and the delightfully chewy (but never tough) rings of calamari, and who can even be bothered to remember that the country is shut down? And it doesn't stop there. Diced calabrese sausage – crispy and spicy – ties this dish together in a way that gives me the longest bout of temporary amnesia. Corona-what? I'm just over here eating for the joy of eating, for all that is good, for all the pants that are stretchy, for all the times that I took for granted that someone would come by without me asking to refill my water. NO ONE IN MY HOUSE EVER BOTHERS TO REFILL MY WATER, EVEN IF I ASK.

A slice of flourless chocolate cake, "Chocolate Amore" (\$9), hits the spot at the end of my emotional eating bender, the same spot that is never full and longs for the days when dining rooms will be open again. It will happen. But until it happens, please remember to continue tipping. These people making and boxing up your orders are the reason you're able to enjoy a really nice meal without having to wear pants. 🍷

Christy is a lover of all foods. When she's not cooking food, eating food, or taking pictures of food, she and her husband are working on a new restaurant in Holly Springs called the Pimiento Tea Room. Follow their progress on Instagram @pimientotearoom.



The Corbetto is a red sauced, mozzarella flatbread that comes topped with a delectable combination of roasted red pepper, mushrooms, and kalamata olives.



The Shrimp & Calamari is served with a rich and briny squid ink linguine and comes dressed in the most exquisite sauce of all: Bella Monica's red pepper crema.



The lone word “pizza” sign above Bella Monica beckons fans-in-the-know to their favorite Italian restaurant in Raleigh.



Corbett and Julie Monica opened Bella Monica in 2000 with great Italian recipes and award-winning wines.



Part 2 – Dine-In

BY BRIAN ADORNETTO, FOOD EDITOR • PHOTOS BY CRASH GREGG

Not for nothin’, but I have to admit that I’m kind of annoyed. Bella Monica had been open for more than 10 years before I discovered it in 2015. Don’t get me wrong; we’d found a good Italian restaurant or two on our foodie travels with the *Downtowner*, but you have no idea how much so-called “authentic,” “New York Style” and “Old Country” food I’ve suffered through over the years. (Let’s just say I’ve had enough fugazzi gravy to fill up a couple of swimming pools.) Now, five years later in 2020, and they’re better than ever.

In case you’re new to the area like I was and haven’t heard of Bella Monica yet, I’ll tell you how to find this hidden Italian gem. Head over to the Olde Raleigh Village Shopping Center on Edwards Mill Road and look for Bella Monica on the corner to the left of Harris Teeter. From the parking lot, however, its only visible marking is a small “PIZZA” sign above the green awning out front. There’s an interesting story behind the sign that Chef-owner Corbett Monica shared with us. For their new restaurant venture, Corbett and his wife Julie signed a lease for a space that



Once you’re inside, you’ll be warmly greeted, shown to your table and brought homemade focaccia with olive oil, fresh herbs and roasted onions (*make sure you save some for later!).

was previously a pizza joint. Money was tight, so they took down part of the previous restaurant’s sign, leaving just the word “pizza” on the building, figuring one day, they’d have a new sign installed with the Bella Monica name. The lack of

a sign became part of their schtick – a restaurant hidden in plain sight – and so the lone pizza sign still remains today.

Once you’re inside, you’ll be warmly greeted, shown to your table and brought homemade focaccia with olive oil, fresh herbs and roasted onions (*make sure you save some for later). Looking at the wine list, you’ll notice it’s broken down into Italian regions, stemming from the Alps to the Mediterranean coast. For something truly unique and special, check out their “Jack Pot List,” Corbett’s personal cellar wines that are aged off site until they hit their prime. Here, wine lovers will find truly unique wines and vintages that you won’t find anywhere else. There are also rotating by-the-glass options with something for everyone. It’s no wonder they’ve won Wine Spectator’s Award of Excellence every year since 2000.

In addition to Bella Monica’s main menu, which features Corbett’s signature dishes as well as his grandmother’s classic Italian recipes, there is also a Gluten Free Menu, which offers a wide variety of antipasti, over a dozen entrées, and even several flatbreads.



Take your choice of Mix and Match Bruschetta on toasted ciabatta bread with bright and salty cannellini beans, parmesan-reggiano, roasted garlic, red onion, and rosemary, or the classic: fresh tomato, basil, garlic, and EVOO.

We began our meal with the Mix and Match Bruschetta (\$12) on toasted ciabatta bread and a Fresh Watermelon Panzanella Salad (a special for the day). For the bruschetta, you can choose to mix or match the bright and salty cannellini bean, parmesan-reggiano, roasted garlic, red



The watermelon salad was deliciously light and refreshing with watermelon, crunchy toasted housemade croutons, crumbled feta, red onion, arugula, basil, and cucumbers, all tossed in a light olive oil/lemon dressing.

onion, and rosemary, and the classic fresh tomato, basil, garlic, and EVOO. The watermelon salad is perfect for summer and a menu special on the day we were there. It was deliciously light and refreshing with watermelon, crunchy toasted housemade croutons, crumbled feta, red onion, arugula, basil, and cucumbers, all tossed in a light olive oil/lemon dressing. Our antipasti included Roasted Mushrooms (\$12), and Sautéed Calamari (\$12). The local

wild mushrooms were roasted with garlic and herbs, tossed with butter and Pecorino, and topped with a sunny side up local organic egg. When cutting into the egg, the runny yolk oozed onto the plate and mingled with the butter and cheese to create a rich sauce that I joyfully stirred into the earthy mushrooms. The only way I can describe it is life-changing. The basil-seared calamari was cooked perfectly and came plated next to a bed of arugula, cannellini beans, carrots, and red onion. We had to try Mom's Old School Meatballs (\$12) just because. The handrolled meatballs covered in gooey ricotta cheese filling were heavenly and the marinara gravy was spot on; it was absolute perfection.


All the entrées sounded terrific, but we finally decided on the Chicken Balsamico (\$18), Mussels (\$15), Baked Ziti (\$15), Salmon Wild Copper River Sockeye (\$24), and the seasonal NC Speckled Trout Piccata (a nightly special). The chicken was served with roasted tomatoes, sautéed spinach and honey balsamic sauce. The sweet and vinegary combination was a big hit at our table (*use some of the focaccia you saved from earlier to sop up that >>>

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The NC Speckled Trout Piccata features mouth-watering trout from Raleigh's Locals Seafood and was perfectly plated over roasted squash, zucchini, and heirloom cherry tomatoes from the State Farmers Market.



incredible sauce). The tender, juicy mussels were bathed in a mushroom leek crema with sliced ciabatta – all in all, perfectly executed. The ziti, with its bubbling golden mozzarella, fluffy ricotta, and marinara coated pasta, tasted like home. If you still have focaccia left, you'll finish it here. The salmon was cooked flawlessly and was companioned perfectly with deep roasted tomatoes, artichokes, spinach, orzo, and a caper burro sauce. If by chance you STILL have any focaccia left over, here's another great place to use it on the leftover sauce. If not, order another plate (it's worth it). The mouth-watering trout from Raleigh's Locals Seafood was plated over roasted squash, zucchini, and heirloom cherry tomatoes from the State Farmers Market. This dish simply could not have been any better.

The Crème Brulée Napoleon (\$9) and Chocolate Amore (\$9) completed our amazing Italian meal. Chef Corbett reconstructed the brûlée, layering crisp cinnamon sugar crusted phyllo squares with a superb custard. Brilliant. The gluten-free Amore was a dense, fudge-like cake that packed some serious chocolate flavor.

Eating at Bella Monica is like having Sunday dinner at grandma's house in the old country of Italy – tons of really great food, good wine, and the company of family and friends. I'm thankful I finally found it; better late than never. Stop by and discover it for yourself. 🍷

Brian is a culinary instructor, food writer, and chef. His business, Love at First Bite, specializes in private cooking classes and intimate personal chef services. Brian can be contacted by visiting www.loveatfirstbite.net or email him at brian@welovedowntown.com.

Bella Monica Cucina & Vino

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Friday & Saturday: 11am to 11pm

\$\$\$

Meals: Lunch, dinner

Cuisine: Italian

Atmosphere: A welcoming and cozy trattoria

Dress: Casual

Noise Level: Moderate to high

Service: Knowledgeable, friendly and professional
Features: Vegetarian, low carb, and gluten-free options, takeout, heated and covered outdoor seating, bar dining, catering, private party room, kid-friendly, great for families, credit cards accepted

Wine List: Award-winning, all Italian

Alcohol: Beer and wine only

Parking: Huge lot

Reservations: Recommended

Downtowner Tips: Go hungry. Be sure and make a reservation on the weekends or you might have a long wait ahead of you.

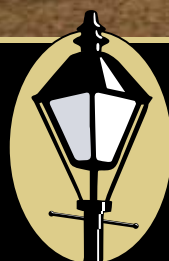
Recommended Dishes: Really, you can't go wrong with ANYTHING on the menu!

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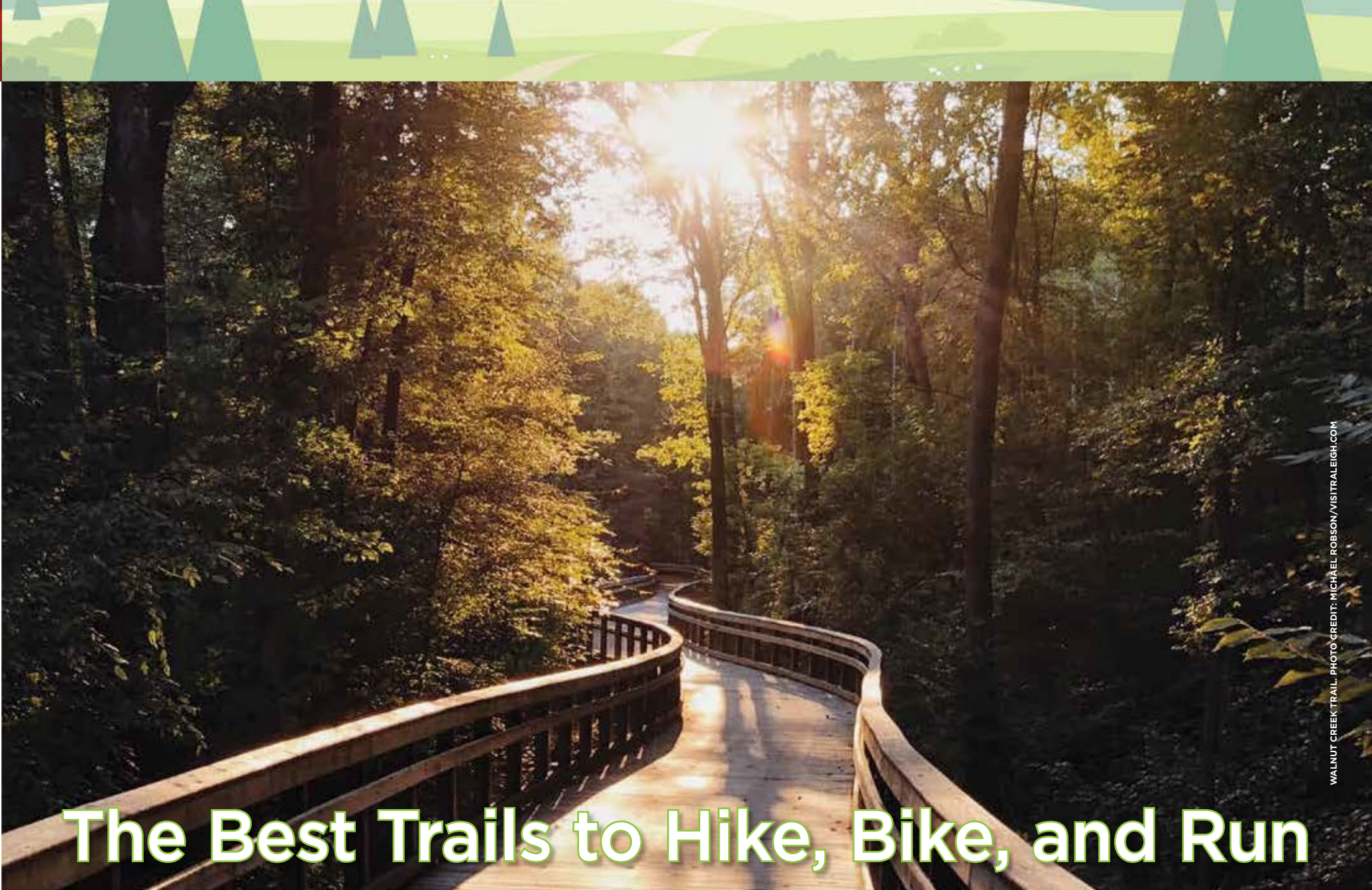
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WALNUT CREEK TRAIL. PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL ROBSON/VISITRALEIGH.COM

The Best Trails to Hike, Bike, and Run

By MICHAEL ROBSON



Through a collaborative partnership with Visit Raleigh, the Downtowner is proud to help promote Raleigh and the entire Wake County area. The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (Visit Raleigh) is the official and accredited destination marketing organization for all of Wake County. For more things to do in the Raleigh area, check out www.visitRaleigh.com, where this article originally appeared.

There's no shortage of ways to find peaceful escapes in order to explore the outdoors throughout Raleigh, Cary, and Apex (check out our list for Durham in next month's issue). And during this time of COVID-19, when we're all getting a little cabin fever from being cooped up inside, there's no better time to get outside and enjoy some of the area's best trails. Visit any of the 180 miles of greenways or numerous other miles of trails traversing through parks, and you'll find runners getting in workouts, cyclists out for leisurely rides, parents pushing strollers, and people of all ages soaking up the fresh air. Below are some of our favorite spots to seek out solitude and sun.

William B. Umstead State Park

One of N.C.'s most-visited state parks, William B. Umstead State Park remains a peaceful getaway thanks to its sheer size – more than 5,000 acres of forest, trails, and lakes sit on the edge of Raleigh, Cary and Morrisville. With 13 miles of multi-use trails that follow a series of rolling hills (perfect for horseback riding, jogging, and cycling) and 22 miles of dedicated hiking trails, this is a must-hit destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Cyclists are drawn to Umstead for the gravel riding – the multi-use paths are a mixture of hard-packed dirt surfaces along with some fairly rocky gravel sections among the handful of trails that are open to bikes. No paved roads will be found here, and that's part of the appeal. You'll see all types of rides tackling the terrain inside Umstead, from

full-suspension mountain bikes to trendy, new gravel bikes (road bikes with bigger tires). The important thing is you'll want tires that are, at minimum, 28mm in width (bigger will be better) to comfortably handle the bumpy surface.

One favorite way to take advantage of the multi-use trails for both cyclists and runners is to park your vehicle at the Old Reedy Creek Road trailhead (there are plenty of parking spots, bathrooms, and water fountains – also bike repair tools are on hand here). Then head just a couple of hundred yards up the short hill to the park entrance and follow the Reedy Creek Trail on a straight shot until you hit the far end of the park – that's a total of five miles one way. From there, either head back the way you came or turn left to tackle the South and North Turkey Creek Trails (warning: brutally steep in a couple sections!) which will add an additional six miles or so to your route before heading back to your starting point.

Hikers and singletrack runners have plenty of options, too, starting with Sycamore Trail, a moderately easy loop trail with plenty of elevation changes and lots of shade that runs beside Sycamore Creek for a total of 7.2 miles and has the option to connect to many other trails along the way.

Total mileage: As much or as little as you like; trails range from one mile to seven miles and can be mixed and matched

Best for: Workouts; trail running; hiking; gravel riding/mountain biking; hills; dogs; families; shade

Lake Crabtree County Park



Established as the Raleigh area's first county park, Lake Crabtree County Park offers hiking, single-track mountain biking, seasonal boat rentals, playgrounds, and more in a location that sits between Cary, Morrisville, and Raleigh. Open to foot traffic only for the majority of the hike, the Lake Trail is a six-mile loop that meanders its way around the 520-acre lake, sometimes coming just a few feet from water and other times veering farther from the shore.

While about half your time is spent in the woods where you won't find much of a crowd, the other half puts you on a new stretch of paved greenway that sees more cyclists, families, and pets enjoying the outdoors (the greenway also passes over a nearly 500-foot-long bridge that crosses the lake). A large open field on the wooded side sits >>>



Lake Johnson Park

against the lake, making for tons of room for picnics and recreation.

Total mileage: The Lake Trail is a six-mile loop, and another 10 miles of multi-use paths can be explored (but keep a heads up for mountain bikers)

Best for: Woodsy hiking; families; picnics; cycling on the greenway; access to Umstead State Park

Lake Johnson Park

Located near NC State University, Lake Johnson Park is a popular spot for students and professionals to get some exercise – a paved, three-mile greenway loop, plus two miles of unpaved trails, draws lots of joggers and walkers (and dogs, too!). The paved section, east of the boathouse, packs some punchy hills and tends to draw a bigger crowd. The unpaved section, west of the boathouse, is flatter but great for hikers looking for a quieter adventure. Bikes are allowed on both sections of the mostly shaded trails but can't complete the full loop on the unpaved side because of an environmentally sensitive area (runners and hikers are still able to complete the loop).

The most recognizable feature of the park is the 700-foot-long boardwalk that cuts directly across the center of the lake, often busy with people dangling fishing poles over the side or watching kayakers and pedal boats (available for rent) circle the 150-acre body of water.

On the northern end of the lake, the east loop of the trail can connect with the Walnut Creek Greenway which gives you access to NC State University's Centennial Campus (two miles away), Dorothea Dix Park (3.5 miles), downtown Raleigh (five miles) and the Neuse River Greenway Trail (13 miles) – lots of great options for more exploring.

Total mileage: Five miles if you complete both loops, and more if you venture outside the park

Best for: Leisurely walks; dogs; running

Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve

Filled with shade during the summer months and rich with color in the fall, Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve provides an easy, family-friendly way to escape to the outdoors in Cary. The 140-acre park – established 40 years ago and named for the atypical group of nearly 200 Eastern Hemlock trees that can be found here – is highlighted by approximately three miles of mulch-covered walking and hiking trails that lead to a series of small overlooks.

The Chestnut Oak Loop trail – traversing 1.2 miles of the hilly (but not difficult) side of the park – winds through the upland forest with ridges, ravines, and creeks, passing by three overlook areas that provide views over the bluffs and bench seating for moments of solitude. The Swift Creek Loop Trail is a short, 0.8-mile section of mulched paths and wooden boardwalks that is mostly flat with a set of 100 stairs that have to be walked down and then back up on your return. Visitors with limited mobility can reach an overlook on the Swift Creek Loop Trail before reaching the stairs.

The 3,700-square-foot Stevens Nature Center provides interactive, educational nature exhibits and historical exhibits from the Piedmont of N.C., plus provides nature interpretation and environmental education programs for all ages throughout the year.

Total mileage: Approximately three miles

Best for: Leisurely walks; summer shade; fall foliage; families; dogs on short leashes; small crowds

White Oak Creek and Black Creek Greenways

A newly completed section of greenway, opened in March of 2019, marked a big occasion for outdoor enthusiasts and residents of Cary and Apex.

A pivotal section of the White Oak Creek Greenway – made up of nearly 1.5 miles of winding boardwalk and a half-mile of pavement – has finished construction, meaning the trail now stretches approximately 7.5 miles in total from east to west, beginning at Fred G. Bond Metro Park (where a perfect field for picnics and plenty of boat rentals await) and ultimately connecting to the American Tobacco Trail. Combined with the Black Creek Greenway (which begins near Lake Crabtree County Park/William B. Umstead State Park and ends at Bond Park), the two greenways make up 15 miles of continuous path which can be used by runners, joggers, cyclists and more.

Mostly flat with a few short and steep hills, the Black Creek Greenway – officially beginning at the Old Reedy Creek Rd. trailhead where bathrooms and more than 80 parking spaces are available – travels north to south, quietly passing by neighborhoods, schools, and shopping areas. The White Oak Creek Greenway, also mostly flat, passes through more rural areas of Cary and Apex, using lots of boardwalks to cross over marshes and wetlands, before connecting to a gorgeous, unpaved portion of the heavily trafficked American Tobacco Trail.

Together, these two greenways now make up a portion of the longest complete metro stretch of the East Coast Greenway (an in-

development route of trails and greenways that will ultimately stretch 3,000 miles up and down the East Coast), plus provide connections to travel from one side of Wake County to the other (and beyond!).

Total mileage: 15 miles total, from William B. Umstead State Park to the American Tobacco Trail (more if you continue in either direction)

Best for: Families, children, pets on leashes, runners, slow bike rides

Neuse River Greenway Trail

The Neuse River Greenway Trail – a 27.5-mile paved, uninterrupted greenway that stretches from Falls Lake in North Raleigh to the Wake County line in southeast Raleigh – is a year-round haven for outdoor recreation. With views of historical sites as well as winding boardwalk areas and suspension bridges crossing over wetlands, the trail is open to joggers, walkers, runners, cyclists, and others. Many consider the Neuse River Greenway Trail to be the gem of the 100-plus-mile Capital Area Greenway System.

There's no shortage of starting and stopping points along the trail, but one easy access point for visitors is to begin at the Falls Lake trailhead, where The Bike Guy – a full-service bike shop with rental bikes available – sits right beside the parking lot. Heading south, you'll find lots of families, children, and more foot traffic in general in the first few miles before the path clears quite a bit. From the trailhead, it's approximately eight miles of flat terrain until you reach Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve, a 146-acre jewel of open space surrounded by some of the most scenic greenway miles in the entire area (a parking lot here is also a good option for starting a run or ride).

The southern portion of the trail travels through more wetlands and secluded areas and is less trafficked, but equally scenic. A good place to start is Anderson Point Park, which has plenty of parking, bathrooms, and water fountains. From here, you'll begin to find white picket fences running along wide-open land and a mix of shaded and sunny portions of the trail. If you time it right, you'll find acres upon acres of sunflower fields in full bloom in early or mid-July. It's approximately 11 miles from Anderson Point Park to the end of the trail, with just one or two short and small hills to compete with.

Total mileage: 55+ miles if you're up for a full out-and-back, but lots of starting and stopping points are available.

Best for: Long runs and rides; families; solitude



Neuse River Greenway Trail

Art to Heart Trail



Beginning at the NC Museum of Art (where parking and admission to the museum are free) and ending in downtown Raleigh, this 5.9-mile, paved trail winds through the museum's beautiful 164-acre park, passes behind Meredith College, cuts through the main campus of NC State University, zips by Pullen Park, and finishes in the heart of the Raleigh just outside of the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts.

The trail can be done in reverse, of course, and bike racks are on hand at the museum so you can lock up for a bit while you explore the galleries (highly recommended) or set up for a lunch break in the park outside. Relatively flat, the Art to Heart Trail does have a couple stand-out hills on the edge of the museum park. If coming from downtown, the final hill into the museum park is a short and steep 0.2-mile climb with an eight-percent average gradient. According to Strava – a popular GPS tracking app for athletes – cyclists have made more than 20,000 attempts at this hill since 2011 (the fastest ever recorded time to the top is 29 seconds; mere mortals will take closer to 90 seconds).

For those interested in a more leisurely stroll, you really never have to leave the museum park. A one-mile paved trail, the Blue Loop, is open to walkers, skaters, joggers, and cyclists. Families with young children, strollers, and dogs are a common sight along this path that traverses past some of the park's major art pieces. An additional mile of unpaved trails, not open to cyclists, is a perfect way to find some solitude amongst nature.

Total mileage: 5.9 miles if you complete the trail in one direction

Best for: Leisurely strolls; running; bike rides; families; art lovers; college campus views; picnics

Shelley Lake Park

The paved, two-mile trail that loops around Shelley Lake is a favorite for many in the North Raleigh area. Relatively flat, and shade-covered for about half of the loop, the trail provides great views of the lake almost the entire way around (and is a go-to spot for sunset watching).



Shelley Lake Park



Dorothea Dix Park

Because Shelley Lake tends to draw a pretty good crowd (including lots of kids and dogs), it's better for runners and walkers rather than cyclists, especially at peak times. A couple of open spaces that are great for families to kick a soccer ball around or throw a frisbee, plus bathrooms, water fountains, and a fishing pier are also onsite.

Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife – as of spring 2018, it's reported that multiple blue heron nests and at least one bald eagle's nest are active.

Total mileage: Two miles

Best for: Leisurely strolls; families; lake views; running

Green Hills County Park



This county park, now with a brand-new name, opened in July of 2010, just two years after the landfill that previously occupied the space ceased operations. North Wake Landfill District Park – as it was called until recently – was the result of transforming the 73-acre site back into a public space filled with greenery and a massive hill that's perfect for running and biking up and down.

The park is made of 1.8 miles of paved trails, two miles of mountain biking trails, a small mountain biking skills practice area and a 1.4-mile cycling, running and walking lane that circle the main hill. The

main attraction, The Top of the Hill Trail, is a short, steep, and rocky climb (almost 200 feet of elevation are gained in just under a tenth of a mile), rewarded with a 360-degree view of Wake County that can't be found anywhere else – on a clear day you'll be able to see the downtown Raleigh skyline in the distance (nearly 10 miles away!). A second steep hill, slightly smaller and just a stone's throw away, makes for a good warmup or practice run.

One of the best things about Green Hills is the connection to the Neuse River Greenway Trail. Starting at the Falls Lake trailhead on the Neuse River Greenway Trail, you get the chance to branch off towards Green Hills just 2.6 miles into your trek – a short, 1.5-mile detour on the Abbotts Creek Greenway takes you straight into the entrance of the county park, giving runners and cyclists a chance to tackle some hills before continuing on their way.

Total mileage: Approximately two miles; repeat as necessary

Best for: Workouts; hill repeats; mountain biking; running

Dorothea Dix Park

When the 308-acre property at Dorothea Dix Park was acquired by the City of Raleigh in 2015, it instantly became the largest city park in the City of Oaks – the site blends historic buildings and rich landscapes on the edge of downtown Raleigh (the closest park entrance is about one mile from the Raleigh Convention Center). Named for Dorothea Lynde Dix, an American activist on behalf of people with mental illness, the site spent 150 years as Dorothea Dix Hospital and more recently has been home to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. In the future, the City of Raleigh has big plans for a transformative public space.

For now, massive open fields, tree-lined streets, downtown skyline views, and very minimal car traffic make this park an ideal place for all sorts of outdoor activities. There are no real trails here (although the Walnut Creek Greenway does connect along the northern edge of the park), but you can follow the paved roads inside the park to map your own adventure. A loop along the outer edges comes out to a little under three miles total – it's not uncommon to see some of the area's fastest runners putting in some tough workouts here on any given day.

Cyclists can rack up the miles here, too – the pavement is a bit bumpy in spots though, which is why our preference is to go off-road and try out the almost-hidden cyclocross course in the back of the park (cyclocross is a winter sport for racing bicycles through dirt, grass, mud, and sometimes over obstacles). The curvy, winding dirt course, nearly two miles in length, is best for mountain bikes or other bikes designed to take some bumps.

Whether you're running, biking, or walking, be sure to leave some time to take in the views – there aren't many better vantage points to see the Raleigh skyline.

Total mileage: That's up to you, but a roughly three-mile loop can be done around the outside of the park and a nearly two-mile cyclocross loop can be found in the southwest portion of the park

Best for: Workouts; solitude; skyline views; picnics; easy access to downtown Raleigh 📍

★ Count ON ME NC ★

A new multi-partner program helps to build consumer confidence and address safety in restaurants and other businesses

The North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association (NCRLA) has joined forces with industry leaders, academic partners, and state officials on an innovative public health initiative for safely reopening restaurants and other businesses while addressing consumers' need for trustworthy standards. Called Count On Me NC, the program provides specific guidance to restaurants, hotels, and other businesses on best practices on protecting guests during COVID-19 restrictions. It centers on an evidence-based training program that provides specific guidance to restaurants, hotels, attractions, and other businesses on best practices for North Carolina's phased reopenings. The campaign directs consumers to look for Count On Me NC certificates and logos for assurance that a business has completed the voluntary, no-cost training.

Count On Me NC is a public-private partnership conceived by the NCRLA Foundation and developed with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC State Extension, and Visit North Carolina. "Businesses

and customers need to work together if the state hopes to expand its reopening," said Lynn Minges, President & CEO of NCRLA. "To prevent the spread of the coronavirus, I encourage all businesses to participate in the free Count On Me NC training program. Working together, we can and will recover more quickly from this devastating pandemic."

NCRLA asked NC State Extension to develop the training modules using its renowned team of experts in food safety training and adult education. NC State Extension responded quickly by anchoring the program on its existing system for delivering adult education online. Those that complete the training will receive a printable certificate to display and will be able to use the Count on Me NC logo in their marketing and promotions.

"The training incorporates the best available science," said Dr. Ben Chapman, professor and food safety specialist at NC State University. "Our team combined federal agency recommendations with NC-specific guidance and supplemented with data in the peer-reviewed literature to build this foundational program."

Phase one of the training, outlined below, is designed for restaurant and foodservice establishments that are

reopening dining rooms and other areas. Restaurateurs will be asked to encourage staff to complete the Count On Me NC training, print the certificate of completion, and display the certificate and window decal at their restaurants as well as the Count on Me NC logo on their website/app, linking it to www.countonmenc.org.

Visit NC, which markets the state to domestic and international travelers, came on board to encourage involvement from local tourism leaders, museums, attractions, outfitters, retailers, and other tourism-related businesses. Visit NC will draw on its vast network of travelers to build visitor awareness of the program.

"Research shows us that the public is eager to begin dining out and traveling," said Wit Tuttell, director of Visit NC, a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. "But it also shows that they have very high expectations for cleaning and social distancing protocols."

Visit www.countonmenc.org to learn more about the Count On Me NC program.

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From the Publisher

coming months. Even those who have made it this far are still struggling, with limited seating capacity and many customers opting to stay home instead of dining out.

I urge you to eat out when you can – if you feel comfortable doing so – and if not, please consider ordering take out and enjoying a great meal at home. We're lucky to have some of the best dining in the country right here in the Triangle, and local restaurants are much of what make an area unique. Our many talented chefs help keep the Triangle in national news with their flavorful menus, award-winning dishes, and community involvement. Scott Crawford, Ashley Christensen, Cheetie Kumar, Sean Fowler, Oscar Diaz, Mike Lee, Angela Salamanca, Jake Wood, Andrea Reusing, Masa Tsumijima, Daniel Schurr, and Matt Kelly are just a few of the very many (apologies to any chef friends who I didn't have room to include).

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Cheers,

Crash

Crash S. Gregg

*Publisher, Triangle Downtowner Magazine (919.828.8000)
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Welcome to Issue 153 of *Triangle Downtowner Magazine*, with acclaimed chef Corbett Monica gracing our cover. His restaurant, Bella Monica, has long been our go-to for fine dining Italian since they first opened and like a good wine, they keep getting better with age. We were glad to see they weathered through NC's Phase One of the coronavirus, when all restaurants were asked to close. We've lost a few local establishments across the Triangle, with many owners not able to stretch their finances to the other side. And unfortunately, we're likely to lose even more over the

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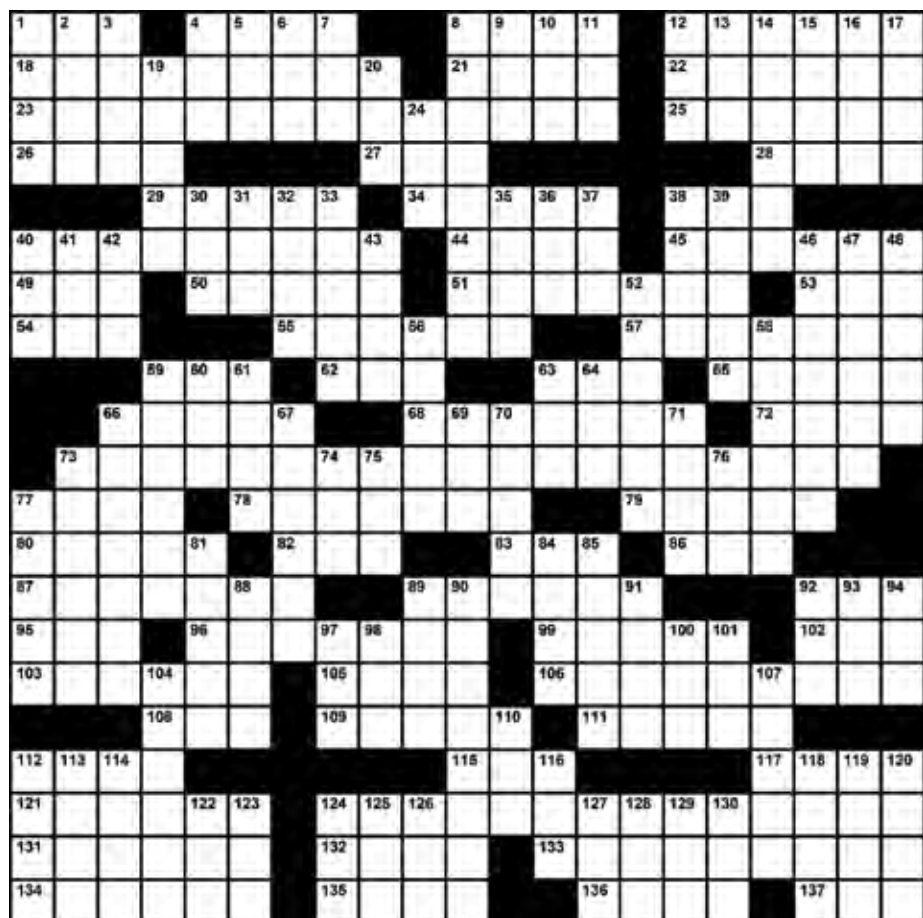
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EATS

ACROSS

1. Rock's Nugent
4. S.A country
8. Served up a whopper
12. Woman's shoe
18. Goal makers
21. ___ point (never)
22. Goddess for whom a European capital is named
23. Celebratory meal, probably
25. Rye and pumpernickel
26. Granada greeting
27. Card game
28. "Ooooh, ___ scared!"
29. Actress Kelly of "Chaplin"
34. Utah lilies
38. Sounds of doubt
40. Business top dog
44. Christmas season
45. Starve
49. New England catch
50. Vichyssoise
51. Vegetable-soup ingredients
53. Government intelligence
54. Abbrs. on city maps
55. Full of holes
57. Mouth sores
59. Street-sign abbr.
62. It's full of periods
63. Computer vacuum
65. Lhasa's land
66. Judge
68. Audio systems
72. Denmark citizen
73. Staple meal
77. Runner's place
78. Japanese massage technique
79. Midwestern tribe
80. Concerned person

82. Airport abbr.
83. Hundredweight
86. Warner of football fame
87. "A Horse with no name" singers
89. Kickoff
92. Horror writer
95. Word before luck or roast
96. Herb for cooking
99. Fleshy red vegetables
102. Toast topping
103. Like many shorelines
105. Two jacks, e.g.
106. Starter at an Italian restaurant
108. Form letters?
109. Murphy's role in "Beverly Hills Cop"
111. "What ___!"
112. Compared to
115. 'The Matrix' role
117. Bali or Capri
121. Pizza ingredient
124. Vegetable dish
131. Aligned
132. Teen affliction
133. Pulp Fiction director
134. Strains
135. Cuts
136. Gasp
137. Mormons, initially

DOWN

1. Part of a dashboard display
2. Canyon sound
3. East Indian lentil sauce
4. Zing
5. Mendez or Peron
6. Coffee order, abbr.
7. Large vase
8. Actor Olivier
9. BBC rival
10. Letter abbr.
11. Homer Simpson's cry
12. Computer key
13. Orch. section
14. Belief in one God
15. Widen, as a hole
16. Connectors
17. Word before Robles or doble
19. Mosque officials
20. Suture
24. ___ Palmas
30. Black gold
31. Suffix with chlor-
32. Coral ___
33. Sprain site
35. Incite
36. Poet's "above"
37. Digital camera type
38. Trade agreement
39. Does without
40. Desktop devices
41. Corrosion
42. Actor Harris and others
43. Boris or Alexander
46. Frozen water packs
47. Femme fatales
48. Undue speed
52. Marine mollusks
56. Shaggy song "It ___ Me"
58. Shanghai
59. More dried out
60. London's "Old" theater
61. Funhouse cries
63. Bordeaux vineyard
64. Like some sleep, for short
66. To that matter
67. Consider again
69. N.F.L. stats
70. Draw out
71. Trough chow
73. Hue and cry
74. Something to pick
75. Auto insurer with roadside service
76. Jima's beginning
77. Suffix with sea or moon
81. More aged
84. Org. with the Chicago Sky and Seattle Storm
85. "Lovergirl" singer ___ Marie
88. Ill-bred men
89. Coup d'___
90. French mountain range
91. Stopped working, abbr.
92. Bedwear, informally
93. Cheerios grain
94. Rock music style
97. Lotion letters
98. ___-Tzu
100. Neither a win nor a loss
101. Locale with a steam bath
104. Iraqi currency
107. Elite
110. Referendum choice
112. Slaving away
113. Unit of loudness
114. Somalian supermodel
116. Baseball great
118. Dirty
119. South Sweden city
120. Beowulf, for one
122. Shoe part
123. Cries of pain
124. ___-jongg
125. Hotel amenity
126. Compass direction
127. Popular music category
128. "... man ___ mouse?"
129. Grandmother
130. Otoscope user, for short

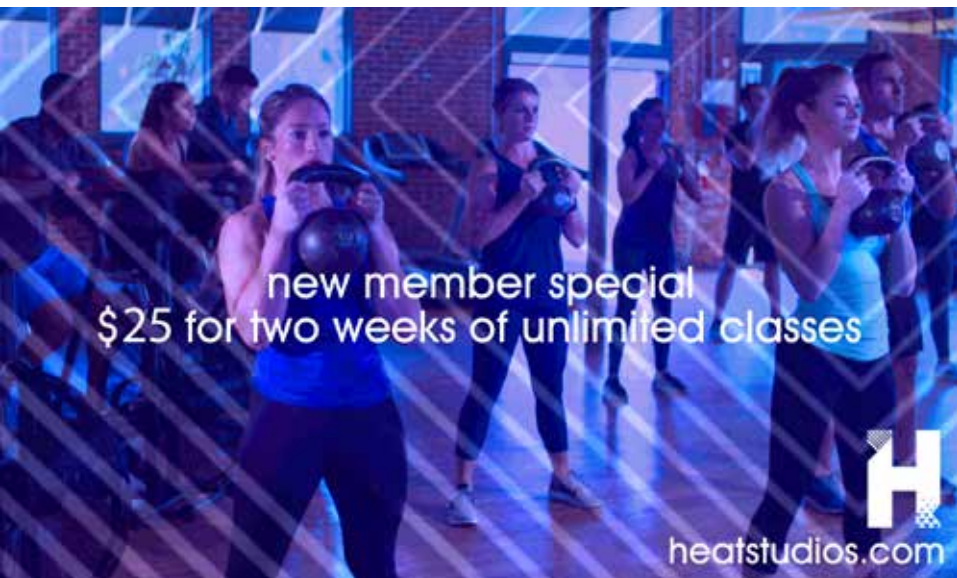
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